Syllabus for Life and Culture in a Totalitarian Regime, Autumn 2010

How was it possible to live freely under a totalitarian regime? How could an independent spirit survive when every part of life – education, work, leisure, travel, even one’s innermost self, was subject to control by the Party? This course will explore some of the ways in which the Czechs preserved their independent (alternative, unofficial, underground) culture through the years of Communism. It will start by tracing the historical patterns which shaped the Czechs’ resistance to ideology, and follow with a look at everyday life under “really existing Socialism” (including the activities of the StB, or secret police). It will continue by examining some of the Czech ways of resistance, such as a close (but exclusive) family life; the rejection of career ambitions; refuge in the countryside; curiosity about Western cultural fashions; jazz, rock’n’roll and beat (including the Jazz Section); theatre (including amateur theatre); unofficial concerts, exhibitions and festivals; home seminars (the “underground university”); samizdat publication and distribution; Charter 77 and “classic” dissidence. Guest speakers will also talk about their own role in the “unofficial culture”.

Please note:
i) the programme will be flexible, to allow for guest speakers.
ii) the following books can be found in multiple copies in the library:
   The Velvet Philosophers by Barbara Day
   Voices from the Inside, edited by Martin Machovec
   Truck Stop Rainbows by Iva Pekárková
   The Pope Smoked Dope, edited by Zdeněk Primus
   All the other readings are in the Course Reader
Topics:

1) Introduction to the course, materials, readings and activities
How the Czechs see themselves; features of Czech society.
Lead up to the years 1948-1989 – how the Czechs lived under the Austro-Hungarian
Empire, the First Republic, the Nazi occupation and post World War II.

2) Czechoslovakia – between East and West?
The Communist putsch of February 1948, and what it meant in practical terms.
What Czechs were taught about the Soviet Union and the United States of America.
The victims – the “bourgeoisie”, resistance fighters, RAF pilots, politicians, lawyers,
small businessmen, independent farmers, priests, monks…
The show trials (General Heliodor Píka; Milada Horáková; Rudolf Slánsky)
and their audience.

Readings: Women of Prague by Wilma A. Igers
Sentenced and Tried by Eugene Loebl

3) Everyday life in the 1950s and early 1960s: family, home, living space, lifestyle,
shopping, education, Party membership, career, work ethics, religion, leisure time,
travel, literature, music (jazz), art, film, theatre…

Readings: Freedom at a Price by Rosemary Kavan
The Miracle Game and Red Music by Josef Škvorecký

4) The (Swinging) Sixties: how things began to get better…. (and why)
The early work of Hrabal, Kundera, Klima, Škvorecký, Vaculík, Havel.
Popular culture in the 1960s – youthful optimism, and how literature, art, music and
the theatre influenced Czech politics and society.
The discovery of rock’n’roll, the “small stages”, the new wave of film…
Rebellion at the Writers’ Congress of 1967.

Readings: The Incredible Rise of Alfred Uruk by Ivan Vyskočil
The Pope Smokes Dope pp. 4-10, 74-88, 90-106
Writers Against Rulers by Dušan Hamšík

Husak’s “normalisation”, and how it changed everyday life & personal relationships.
Resistance to normalisation: the “double life”, the “chata culture”.
Independent activities, the “parallel” culture, the “unofficial” networks.

Readings: 2000 Words by Ludvík Vaculík
Invasion by Colin Chapman
Letter to Dr. Husák by Václav Havel
Truck Stop Rainbows: pp 119-151
6) The struggle against normalisation:
the events of 1976 – Czechoslovakia signs the Helsinki Accords;
the trial of the Plastic People of the Universe.
The creation and signatories of Charter 77; the “Anti-Charter”.
The VONS trials

Readings: Charter 77
What Charter 77 is and what it is not by Jan Patočka
Views from the Inside, pp. 33-48

7) The “underground university” and the production and circulation of samizdat.
The Jazz Section, and international support for the unofficial culture.
Visit to Libri Prohibitii.

Readings: The Velvet Philosophers pp 100-122; 201-213
Views from the Inside pp. 49-79
A Padlock for Castle Schwarzenberg by Ludvík Vaculík

8) First group of presentations.
How the Communist Party controlled the nation through the StB (secret police).

Readings: The Velvet Philosophers pp 245-262
The Opening of the Files
Total Fears by Bohumil Hrabal
My Table at the Belvedere & A Cup of Coffee with my Interrogator by Ludvík Vaculík
Vladimir Dlouhy in the Belvedere

9) Second group of presentations.
The last two years and the phenomenon of independent initiatives…
The Velvet Revolution – the students, the theatres and Civic Forum

Reading: Civic Forum, Day One, transcript of recording 19 Nov 1989

10) Third group of presentations
Review and revision…
How does the totalitarian past influence the democratic present?

Reading: Our Democracy: an inventory – 2009

Required reading (multiple copies in library):
Day, Barbara: The Velvet Philosophers, Claridge Press, Brinkworth 1999
Machovec, Martin (ed): Views from the Inside, Charles University, Prague 2006
Primus, Zdeněk (ed): The Pope Smoked Dope, KANT, Prague 2005
Recommended reading

Goetz-Stankiewicz, Marketa: *Good-Bye, Samizdat*, Northwestern University Press, 1992
Hamišík, Dušan: *Writers Against Rulers*, Hutchinson, London 1971
Hrabal, Bohumil: *Total Fears*, Twisted Spoon Press, Prague 1998
Knižák, Milan: *Actions*, Gallery, Prague 2000
Rocamora, Carol: *Acts of Courage*, Smith and Kraus, Hanover NH 2004
Škvorecký, Josef: *Talkin’ Moscow Blues*, Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd, Toronto 1988
Theiner, George: *New Writing in Czechoslovakia*, Penguin, 1969
Tomin, Zdena: *The Coast of Bohemia*, Hutchinson, London 1987
Vladislav, Jan (ed): *Václav Havel or, Living in Truth*, Faber and Faber, London 1986

(In fact, almost anything by Václav Havel, Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, Josef Škvorecký and Ludík Vaculík counts as recommended reading.)
The undergraduate program aims at equipping students with both theoretical knowledge about the past and origins of European cultures and conceptual tools to analyze cultural phenomena of nowadays societies. Full-time. Studies in Central and Eastern Europe: Histories, Cultures, and Societies (CEE) is an English language program directed to everyone interested in learning about the mechanisms. + 108 Masters Programs in European studies. Scroll to programs.

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